Outside the Lines

Vol. I, No. 3 *SABR Business of Baseball Committee Newsletter* *Fall 1995*

Editor: Doug Pappas, 100 E. Hartsdale Ave., #6EE, Hartsdale, NY 10530-3244, 914-472-7954.
E-mail: 76615.662@compuserve.com or DougP001@aol.com.

75th Anniversary of the Commissioner's Office

After three years of Acting-Commissioner-for-Life Bud Selig, fans may have forgotten that Major League Baseball once had an elected Commissioner with broad theoretical authority. The owners of major league franchises would like to forget that those Commissioners once had broad *practical* authority, sometimes acting in "the best interest of baseball" even when that didn't coincide with their employers' immediate desires. With many Congressmen suggesting that baseball's continued antitrust exemption may hinge on the appointment of an independent commissioner, it's worth reviewing how the Commissioner's Office came into existence.

Since the AL-NL peace treaty of 1903, MLB had been governed by a National Commission consisting of AL President Ban Johnson, Cincinnati Reds President Garry Herrmann, who served as Chairman of the Commission, and a succession of ineffectual NL Presidents. Although as a National Leaguer, Herrmann might have been expected to favor teams in his own league, his years as Ban Johnson's drinking buddy often swayed him toward the junior circuit. But the National Commission functioned with little controversy until a series of decisions from 1915-19 threatened to blow the majors apart.

First, Herrmann's 1915 vote to award future Hall of Famer George Sisler to the St. Louis Browns over the Pittsburgh Pirates caused Pittsburgh owner Barney Dreyfuss to demand that Herrmann be replaced by an independent, neutral Chairman. Dreyfuss continued his campaign over the ensuing years, noting the problems inherent in allowing an executive of one club to rule on matters affecting its competitors. Tensions rose in 1918, when after the Commission awarded pitcher Scott Perry to the Braves over the Athletics, Philadelphia obtained an injunction to block the transfer. Many National League owners blamed Johnson for encouraging the lawsuit, and National League president John Tener resigned from the Commission in disgust, but with the American League backing Johnson, the 1918-19 off-season produced an uneasy truce. At the January 16, 1919 winter meetings, the National League voted 6-2 for a one-man Commission headed by a neutral party, while the American League voted 6-2 to continue the existing Commission. As a result, the two leagues agreed to search for a new Chairman while Herrmann remained in the position on an interim basis.

The truce was shattered in the middle of the 1919 season. After Red Sox pitcher Carl Mays jumped the team on July 13, the Red Sox traded him to the Yankees for two lesser pitchers and $40,000. Johnson reacted by suspending Mays indefinitely for contract jumping; the Yankees responded with an injunction requiring Johnson to let him play. The Yankees and Red Sox became Johnson's sworn enemies, joining White Sox owner Charles Comiskey, who had previously fallen out with Johnson. Since by quirk of the league's rotating governance, these teams then controlled three of the four seats on the American League's Board of Directors, the Board was in revolt against both the league president and a majority of AL teams.

At the January, 1920 winter meetings, the National League forced Herrmann off the National Commission by forcing him to choose between the Commission and the Reds. AL owners resolved their own dispute at Ban Johnson's expense, ordering Mays reinstated and appointing Jake Ruppert of the Yankees and Clark Griffith of the Senators to review all penalties and suspensions of more than 10 days. But the two leagues could not agree on Herrmann's replacement as Chairman of the National Commission. Their five finalists included Judge Landis, already a favorite of Organized Baseball for stalling the Federal League's antitrust suit long enough for the league to fold; his fellow Chicagoan Harvey Woodruff, sports editor of the *Chicago Tribune;* as well as New Yorkers William H. Edwards, NL attorney J. Conway Toole and State Senator (later Mayor) James J. Walker. As a result of the stalemate, the National Commission had only two members when the greatest scandal in baseball history erupted.

Rumors that the 1919 World Series was fixed were circulating even before the Series began. The National Commission's response, or lack thereof, underscored its deficiencies. White Sox owner Comiskey refused to take his suspicions to his enemy Ban Johnson, who initially dismissed them as "the yelp of a beaten cur." He couldn't bring them to chairman Herrmann, the president of the opposing club. The only available Commissioner, NL president John Heydler lacked the incentive or jurisdiction to pursue charges involving an American League team. When the Black Sox scandal exploded onto the front pages in the closing days of the 1920 season, Organized Baseball at last realized that *something* had to be done, and soon.

But what? The National League unified behind the "Lasker Plan," proposed by a Chicago advertising executive who held a small stake in the Cubs. The Lasker Plan would replace the National Commission with a three-man board of eminent citizens with no prior connection to baseball. This board would have total authority over every aspect of Organized Baseball: players, managers, umpires and even clubowners. The October 21, 1920 *Sporting News* identified the front-runners for this three-man board as Judge Landis, General John J. Pershing, and Senator Hiram Johnson of California. A majority of American League teams rejected the Lasker Plan, citing the folly of putting their entire industry under the control of men with no experience in the field, but the three anti-Johnson owners embraced it as a means to free themselves from Johnson's yoke.

On November 8, 1920, the Red Sox, Yankees and White Sox declared war on Ban Johnson and their AL colleagues. They joined the eight NL clubs to announce the formation of a new 12-team league under the Lasker Plan, with Judge Landis to serve as chairman of the new governing tribunal. The new National-American League promised to allow the minor leagues to nominate one of the two remaining members of the new Commission. Forced to choose between loyalty to Ban Johnson and a potentially ruinous civil war, the "Loyal Five" AL owners cast Johnson aside, voting on November 12 to accept Landis as Commissioner. Landis accepted the job later that day, then spent the next two months dictating his own job description to the owners.

When Landis formally assumed the Commissionership on January 12, 1921, the three-person Commission had been scrapped. The owners allowed -- indeed encouraged -- Landis to remain on the federal bench while serving as Commissioner, deducting his $7,500 judge's salary from the Commissioner's $50,000 annual stipend. (Landis ultimately resigned the bench in early 1922, bowing to withering criticism from the bar and the press, as well as the threat of impeachment.) Key provisions of the new Agreement:

- The Commissioner may investigate, "either upon complaint or upon his own initiative, any act, transaction or practice charged, alleged or suspected to be detrimental to the best interests of the national game of base ball," with the authority to fine clubs up to $5,000 per offense, and to suspend or permanently banish any player, employee or league or team official.
- All clubs accept the Commissioner's authority to impose discipline, "and severally waive such right of recourse to the courts as would otherwise have existed in their favor."
- The Commissioner is elected for a seven-year term, with his replacement to be "chosen by a vote of the majority of the clubs composing the two major leagues." Paralleling the Constitutional protection for federal judges, "no diminution of the compensation or powers of the present or any succeeding Commissioner shall be made during his term of office."
- "In the event of failure to elect a successor within three months after the vacancy has arisen, either major league may request the President of the United States to designate a Commissioner, and the person when thus designated shall thereupon become Commissioner with the same effect as if named herein."

Landis ruled Organized Baseball with an iron fist until his death in December 1944. Five months later Senator Albert B. "Happy" Chandler was named to a seven-year term. But the owners changed the rules to require a three-fourths majority to elect a Commissioner: after only a 9-7 majority of owners voted to renew his contract, Chandler resigned effective July 15, 1951. According to the 1952 *Sporting News Guide*, the five finalists to replace Chandler were NL president Ford Frick, Reds president Warren Giles, Penn State president and future First Brother Milton Eisenhower, Gov. Frank Lausche of Ohio (a former minor league player) and General Douglas MacArthur. As MacArthur had just been relieved of command in Korea for refusing to follow direct orders from President Truman, the mind reels to imagine his reaction to accepting dictation from the owners -- but fortunately for their blood pressure, they opted for career yes-man Ford Frick. Except for the Ueberroth era, when the owners again sought someone to save them from themselves, the Commissioners since Frick have largely been independent in name only.

The 1995 Season Off the Field

Attendance: 25,257 per date, down 20% from 1994
Player Salaries (projected to full season): $893 million in 1995, down 1.8% from 1994
Estimated Operating Loss: 1995: $300 million (AP), $250 million (**Andrew Zimbalist**).
1994: $350 million (Business Week), $150 million (Zimbalist)
World Series Nielsen Ratings: Up 13% over 1993
Labor Negotiations, Real Commissioners, Fans of The Baseball Network: 0.

Ownership Changes:

(1) *Atlanta Braves*: Parent Turner Broadcasting tentatively agrees to merge into Time Warner.

(2) *California Angels*: Disney buys 25% of the team from Gene Autry, with an option on the remainder, and becomes managing general partner. No terms disclosed.

(3) *Kansas City Royals*: Title passes from Ewing Kauffman's estate to the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation and Affiliated Trusts. The Foundation will operate the estate for six years or until a purchaser can be found who promises to keep the team in Kansas City; if no local purchaser emerges during this period, the Royals can be sold and moved.

(4) *Oakland Athletics*: Sold by the Haas family for $85 million to a group headed by developers Steve Schott and Ken Hofmann.

(5) *Pittsburgh Pirates*: At press time, on the verge of being sold for $85 million to a syndicate headed by Kevin McClatchy, who has vowed to keep the team in Pittsburgh if a new stadium is built.

Possible Ownership Changes/Threatened Franchise Move

(1) *Houston Astros*: Owner Drayton MacLane has talked to William L. Collins III, apparent loser in the Pirates auction, about selling him the Astros for an estimated $150 million. The team would then move to the Washington, D.C. area, playing in RFK Stadium until a new park can be built in northern Virginia. Since any such move requires the approval of 11 National League and eight American League franchises, and the Astros haven't complied with MLB rules governing franchise relocation, MacLane has now accepted that this won't happen in time for the 1996 season. **Bill Gilbert,** who attended MacLane's press conference, says, "MacLane prefers a solution that keeps the team in Houston. If that doesn't work he will sell the team and get out. MacLane said he has no interest in taking the approach of another major league team (Montreal?) Who showed a profit with a payroll of $14.6 million and a non-competitive team. MacLane only wants to stay in if he can compete."

(2) *St. Louis Cardinals*: Anheuser-Busch, which has owned the Cardinals since 1953, stunned the St. Louis sports community by putting the team and its stadium up for sale as part of a broader corporate divestiture program.

New Stadium Deals:

(1) *Detroit Tigers*: Owner Mike Ilitch and the City of Detroit have announced plans for a $235 million, 42,000-seat natural-grass stadium in downtown Detroit. According to the Associated Press, the State of Michigan would contribute $55 million for road and infrastructure improvements; the City of Detroit would issue bonds for $35 million more; and Tigers owner Ilitch would pay $145 million to build and own the stadium, assuming responsibility for cost overruns. The plan still requires legislative approval, with taxpayer groups and the Tiger Stadium Fan Club expected to lead the opposition.

(2) *Milwaukee Brewers*: Thanks to a 5 a.m. switch by one state senator, the Wisconsin legislature voted on October 6 to build the Brewers a new $250 million stadium. Residents of five counties will foot $160 million of the bill through a 0.1% sales tax increase, while the Brewers will contribute $40 million and borrow another $50 million from a state economic development authority. Allegedly modeled on Brooklyn's cozy Ebbets Field, the 42,000-seat park, with retractable dome and 75 skyboxes, will be constructed in County Stadium's center-field parking lot and is scheduled to open in 1999.

(3) *Seattle Mariners*: After King County voters narrowly rejected a 0.1% sales tax increase to fund a new stadium, the Washington state legislature came up with the funds. For the gory details, see **John Pastier**'s essay on pp. 7-8.

New Stadium Negotiations/Plans/Threats:

(1) *Cincinnati Reds*: Demanding a new baseball-only stadium from Cincinnati and surrounding Hamilton County. Meanwhile, in early September city authorities claimed that owner Marge Schott was $3 million behind on rent payments for Riverfront Stadium, having paid nothing since the abrupt end of the 1994 season. UPI reports that Reds officials admit withholding the rent to increase their leverage in negotiations for a new stadium.

(2) *Minnesota Twins*: Asking for $13 million/year in lease and other concessions in return for signing a new 30-year lease. The current lease allows the team to move after 1998 if attendance falls below 80% of league average or the team sustains a net operating loss. The team blames much of the shortfall on a football-oriented stadium design which leaves the Twins with relatively few desirable seats.

(2) *New York Yankees*: Preliminary negotiations for a new stadium in Manhattan, The Bronx or the New Jersey Meadowlands; may also "settle" for extensive renovation of Yankee Stadium and surroundings. Current lease expires in 2002.

(3) *New York Mets*: Considering a new baseball-only stadium near Shea Stadium, in eastern Queens or on Long Island.

(4) *Pittsburgh Pirates*: Kevin McClatchy's tentative deal for the Pirates lets him move the team unless construction for a new baseball-only stadium begins by 1999.

Public Sentiment Toward Baseball

AP Poll, taken 9/22-9/26:

(1) "Do you normally consider yourself a baseball fan, or not?" 28% Yes, 5% Somewhat, 67% No.

(2) Which side do you support in the labor dispute? 27% Players, 37% Owners, 26% Neither

(3) Effect of the strike on interest in baseball: 2% more interested, 43% less interested, 52% no change

(4) Positive or negative effect of recent changes in baseball:
Wild-card team: 23% good, 10% bad, 24% no difference
Higher player salaries: 10% good, 49% bad, 23% no difference
More teams: 36% good, 14% bad, 29% no difference

(5) "How closely do you plan to follow the World Series in television?" 14% very closely, 24% somewhat closely, 19% not too closely, 42% not at all.

The Baseball Network: R.I.P. (And Don't Come Back!)

If anything good came from the 1994 labor dispute, fans were spared a second year of The Baseball Network, MLB's answer to the Edsel. The original concept was intriguing: in lieu of rights fees, MLB would produce its own telecasts in partnership with ABC and NBC, making its money from advertising revenues. If the audience for baseball grew, most of the profits would flow directly to MLB. But even without the labor dispute dragging revenues down, TBN demonstrated an incredible aptitude for alienating fans. For example:

<u>Regular season exclusivity</u>. To boost ratings of the national "Baseball Night in America" telecast, TBN scheduled every available game to start at 8 PM EDT; blacked out all local telecasts; and fed each MLB market a game involving a local team. Nobody thought long enough to realize that:

(1) MLB doesn't need a national TV contract to show fans their local games;

(2) Showing fans their hometown games only shifts viewers from the local station to the national affiliate, reducing the value of each local contract;

(3) With two teams in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco/ Oakland, every TBN telecast kept half the fans in America's largest markets from watching their favorite team;

(4) The sporadic, badly-promoted TBN telecasts couldn't attract new fans the way regularly scheduled programming might; and

(5) The uniform starting time and cable blackout meant that "Baseball Night in America" telecast *less* baseball than any other day of the week.

Further irritating fans, TBN aggressively enforced its exclusivity even against *noncompeting* telecasts, blacking out midafternoon and late West Coast games. “Baseball Night” thus became the only day when fans in the affected markets had *no* opportunity to watch their local team.

<u>Regionalized postseason telecasts</u>. Even into the playoffs, TBN’s masterminds operated as though their own product had no intrinsic appeal to viewers. In a world where every NFL wild-card game airs nationally

nationally and CBS broadcasts all 63 games of the NCAA men's basketball tournament, MLB's *own television venture* chose to deny viewers access to both league championship series. While this short-sighted strategy may have increased the Nielsen ratings for any one particular telecast, it antagonized baseball's most devoted fans and minimized overall playoff viewership. TBN wasn't even clever enough to use regionalization to its own advantage: even with the entire East and Midwest watching other games, the Dodgers-Rockies playoff games started at 8 PM *Eastern* time, costing TBN countless West Coast viewers.

Inflexible scheduling. The horrors of regionalized playoffs were compounded by TBN's inexplicable refusal to show viewers more of its own product. When the first game of the ALCS ended, Cincinnati and Atlanta had gone to extra innings...but rather than switching fans to this exciting game, TBN signed off in favor of local news! The angry fans who deluged ABC with complaints were told that "contractual obligations" prevented the switch. Why would a partnership formed solely to telecast baseball games force its viewers to watch local news instead of *its own programming*?

The New TV Deal: MLB Gets It Right!

Learning from the debacle of The Baseball Network, MLB reversed a decade of disastrous television policy by negotiating the best contracts in its history. The four-network, five-year deal not only boosts network TV revenues by 50%, but restores the Saturday afternoon Game of the Week, adds a weekly children's program, and increases the number of national cablecasts without reducing local telecasts. The details:

Dollars: $1.587 billion of them, or $317.4 million/year from 1996 through 2000. MLB anticipates another $113 million of international broadcasting revenues, bringing the total to $1.7 billion.

Networks: Fox: $575 million for three World Series, two All-Star Games, one LCS per year, five first-round playoff games per year, and a Saturday afternoon Game of the Week with one-hour pregame show, half of which will be directed to children. The Game of the Week will feature up to four regionalized telecasts, with exclusivity from 1-4 PM in each time zone. The Game of the Week will begin Memorial Day weekend in 1996, but may start earlier in future years.

NBC: $400 million for two World Series, three All-Star Games, one LCS per year and three first-round playoff games per year. No regular season telecasts. (The differential between Fox and NBC implicitly values Fox's Saturday Game of the Week at less than $90 million for five years -- compare that to what the cable networks are willing to pay!)

ESPN: $440 million for a Wednesday doubleheader and Sunday night Game of the Week, as well as all postseason games not aired on Fox or NBC. MLB will stagger the times of first-round games to provide a full-day feast for viewers: ESPN could air games at 1 PM, 4 PM and 11 PM EDT, with the broadcast networks telecasting the prime-time game.

Prime Liberty/fX: $172 million for two games per week in 1997-2000. This joint venture will air games on its choice of two weeknights other than Wednesday -- and its telecasts will not benefit from any form of exclusivity.

The United League: Any Pulse Remaining?

In mid-August, the United Baseball League announced that it would begin play in 1996 with eight teams and a 154-game schedule. The UBL identified its charter franchises -- Long Island; Washington, DC; Orlando/ Kissimmee; Puerto Rico; New Orleans; Los Angeles; Portland, Oregon; and Vancouver, BC -- and a TV deal with Liberty Sports for regional, cable and international broadcasts of UBL games. A few problems remained:

(1) The Long Island team's stadium remained unbuilt;
(2) The Los Angeles team would play in the L.A. Coliseum, one of the worst baseball facilities imaginable;
(3) Kissimmee's stadium operator asserted it had never discussed lease terms with the UBL;
(4) Portland's stadium authority first learned of the UBL's interest from a *Baseball Weekly* article which "came as quite a shock to us"; and finally,
(5) The UBL's TV partner, Liberty Sports, formed a partnership with Fox's fX cable network and began negotiating to telecast MLB games, ultimately winning the rights to two games each week.

The UBL subsequently postponed its debut until 1997. I'm not holding my breath...

MLB's Stealthy Territorial Annexation

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article exposed MLB's startling expansion of its teams' protected territories -- an expansion which threatens the recent trend toward suburban minor-league teams, but which may prove a may prove a boon to independent leagues.

For sixty years, the National Agreement provided major-league teams with territorial exclusivity within a five-mile radius of their home city. This zone of exclusivity has now been redefined to include a *fifteen*-mile radius around each team's home city *and county*. The Mets and Yankees, for instance, can now claim exclusive rights to all or part of nine suburban counties in three states, with more residents than the entire San Francisco Bay Area. The Cubs and White Sox control nine Illinois and Indiana counties; the Phillies, eight Pennsylvania and New Jersey counties. Minor-league teams will also enjoy county-wide exclusivity.

The *Journal* quoted Jimmie Lee Solomon, MLB's director of minor-league operations: "We can't just have teams popping up all over the place. If I'm going to invest in a team I want to have some certainty about what my territory is and how my neighbors are going to act." Others, more familiar with basic principles of a market economy, begged to differ: "I'm outraged that the major-league owners continue to abuse their exemption under the antitrust laws," said Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch. "I don't think they are taking Congress seriously." Earlier this year Hatch's Judiciary Committee voted, 8-7, to strip MLB of its antitrust exemption with respect to labor matters; a few more moves like this could imperil the entire exemption. But even with the exemption, MLB can't stop independent leagues from moving in: Mike Veeck's St. Paul Saints (Northern League) already compete successfully against the Minnesota Twins, and others may follow.

Labor Developments

No news -- but this may be good news for fans. After the Second Circuit affirmed Judge Sotomayor's injunction, the 1996 season appears safe. The injunction forbids the owners from declaring another bargaining impasse without court approval, and even the hard-line owners seem to recognize that their 7-1/2 month delay in formulating a proposal will prevent them from declaring an impasse during this off-season. Meanwhile, MLB continues to operate with no salary cap, luxury tax or additional restrictions on free agency - terms far less favorable to the owners than if they had accepted the players' last offer before the injunction.

Researchers' Queries

These come from SABR members who haven't joined the Committee:

(1) **Clifford Blau**, 16 Lake St., Apt. 5D, White Plains, NY 10603, seeks information on changes in the rules affecting team rosters: waivers, roster limits, and reserve rules.

(2) **Marc Fink**, 2748 East 9th Street, Tucson, AZ 85716, seeks obscure or unpublished information about the Players' League of 1890 and its financial backers.

Salary Database

Thanks to **Tim Hylan**, **Leon Battista**, **Andy McCue**, **John McMurray** and others, I've now collected over 11,000 salaries, including a large data set verified by the IRS in connection with litigation over the value of the Milwaukee Brewers; the complete *USA Today* salary lists for every season since 1985; and over 3,000 salaries from microfilmed newspaper and *Sporting News* accounts. More than 8,000 have been entered into the master database, with the rest to follow before the next newsletter.

Newsletters from Committee Members

Two members of the Business of Baseball Committee publish their own informal commentaries about baseball on and off the field. **Bill Gilbert** offers his periodic musings free of charge to anyone with an E-mail account -- to be added to his mailing list, drop Bill a note at 73623.2146@compuserve.com. **Gene Carney** circulates his *Notes from the Shadows of Cooperstown* to sports editors via U.S. Mail, but may be willing to expand into electronic publishing; if you're interested, drop him a note at TwoFingr@aol.com. Gene also sent me a copy of the class-action complaint filed on behalf of San Diego Padres season ticket holders in 1993 following the team's trades of Gary Sheffield and Fred McGriff, as well as a good deal of strike-related commentary and informational leaflets from "Sports Fans United," a self-proclaimed "fans' lobby." Copies of anything in the Committee archives are available from me for 12 cents/page to cover copying and mailing.

The Mariners Get a New Stadium, by **John Pastier**

In September, residents of King County, Washington (pop. about 1.6 million), voted on a 0.1% sales tax increase to fund a new $286 million baseball-only stadium for the Mariners, plus retirement of the approximately $65 million Kingdome roof repair debt and about $125 million of Kingdome alterations for the NFL Seahawks. The Mariners promised to sell the team to out-of-town interests if the stadium tax measure failed. One owner said "vote no, and you say goodbye to baseball forever."

The team insisted on a retractable roof, and wanted a relatively isolated site south of the Kingdome (where it would be able to capture a greater share of the revenue from parking, food, drink, and merchandise), rather than the ideal site just north of the Kingdome and immediately adjacent to the active Pioneer Square commercial/ entertainment/tourist district that is well served by public transit. The south site would require street vacation and displacement of businesses and manufacturing jobs, while the north site is already fully cleared.

The M's also promulgated images of a mechanical-monster stadium design recycled from a rejected proposal for Phoenix, saying it was uniquely suited to the Northwest.

The pro-stadium organization, "Home Town Fans," spent more than $1 million, by far a local record, on the campaign. They used the services of the state's prime political campaign consultants, Gogerty & Stark. The newspapers were fully on board, not just in their editorials, but in their news coverage, and also to the tune of providing $40,000 in free ads. The sports radio stations also outdid themselves in beating the drums for the measure. The organized opposition, "Citizens For More Important Things," spent $30,000.

Home Town Fans lost the vote by the narrow margin of 50.1%- 49.9%, even though they mobilized and registered many first-time voters. Expectedly, the absentee ballots were heavily opposed to the measure, while the walk-in vote was moderately favorable. Unexpectedly, the liberal city districts voted no, while the Republican East-side suburban precincts voted yes. Most of the team's dozen or so owners live in the eastern suburbs. The principal owner and head of Nintendo, Mr. Yamauchi, lives considerably west of town in Japan and has never attended a Mariner game.

The pro campaign never discussed the design, roof, or location issues, turning the vote into a pure referendum on baseball rather than focussing on what the public would get for how much money. The cost was stated as $240.8 million in public funds, and $45 million from the Mariners. The Mariners share included the revenue from naming rights, which were not theirs to give since they would not be the stadium owners. The politically appointed task force that deliberated the stadium issue last year felt that the financing mix should be 55% public and 45% private. In their final report, they backed down and recommended 35% private funding. Somehow, the actual ballot measure wound up being about 84% public and 16% private funding.

In the final weeks of the campaign, the ads stressed voting yes for the sake of the kids who wouldn't be able to see major league baseball if the measure lost. But the Mariners' plan envisioned reducing the number of general-admission seats by 84%, from 18,150 to 2,900. Where were the kids and families supposed to sit?

After the losing vote on Sept 19th, there was immediate political activity to find tax money for a stadium anyway. The Mariners' amazing pennant drive obviously helped here. The ownership graciously agreed to wait until Oct. 30 before putting up their team for sale. But who could the potential buyers be? The only workable venue seemed to be Washington DC- Northern Virginia, and the Orioles would be sure to exert their territorial rights to keep an AL team out of that market. Aside from DC, the biggest US-Canada market without a major league baseball team is Portland, which is about half the size of Seattle. Mexico City, anyone?

The governor called a special session of the legislature, and after some major head-butting, the Republicans, who opposed the measure, came on board. (These legislative party positions were a reversal of the citizen voting pattern.) Some money would come from the state and the Mariners, but most would come from personalized license plates, a new baseball scratch-card lottery, a stadium admission tax hike from 5% to 10%, and sales tax increases of 0.5% on restaurant and bar bills (8.7% total) and 2% on rental cars (a whopping 19% total.)

But, as constituted, the state's "solution," which was modified to bring the Republicans into the fold, was felt by many county officials to be fiscally unpalatable. While the state's and the Mariners' contributions are capped, the county's share is not. Also, unlike the original measure, it makes no provision for paying off either the emergency repairs already made on the Kingdome roof, or the major Kingdome remodeling demanded by the Seahawks. The County Council grumbled, but finally voted yes by a 12-1 margin -- far more conclusively than when they decided to put the original and fiscally more sound state-defined measure on the county ballot.

Somehow, the $285.8 budget of September was up to $320 million less than a month later -- the new figure was stated without explanation or any acknowledgment that it represented an increase. This also means

means that the funding split now stands at about 86% public - 14% private. Reallocate the naming rights to the public side of the ledger, and it becomes somewhere between 89%-11% and 92%-8% -- let's call it 90%-10% Then, since this will be funded by bonds, one has to add interest costs, which will nearly double the budget. Since the Mariners' contribution won't increase, their true share will be about 5% of a $600 million undertaking. Or, more accurately, their suiteholders' and club-seat- subscribers' share, since that's where the money is expected to come from.

The retractable roof is expected to cost about $50 million ($100 million with interest). No fan that I know wants it, and weather studies show it to be unnecessary. The five California teams obviously have better weather conditions, but, of the remaining major league cities, Seattle has the fewest inches of rain and the second-fewest days of rain during the baseball season. The Mariners claim that "the threat of rain" would hold down their attendance, and cite mythical fans from as far away as Idaho who won't make plans to attend games without a roof. How have the east coast and midwestern baseball cities, some of which get twice as much rain, survived without roofs for nearly a century?

The Mariners' insistence on a roof clearly lost them the election. One of their campaign strategists said privately that the roof cost them 8% to 10% of the vote. Local politicians asked them to scuttle the roof, both before the vote and after, but to no avail. As finally mandated, the Mariners will have veto powers over the design, location, and specifications, and will select the architects for the new stadium, in violation of county procurement policy.

The economics and politics of sports stadiums seems without parallel in any other sector of our economy. The public makes a huge investment to benefit a private, for-profit entity, and that entity pays little of the cost while determining the financial scope of the project almost unilaterally. The rent on these stadiums doesn't come close to paying the project costs, interest, and operating expenses, which, on the Seattle park, would cost about $30 million annually without including operating or maintenance costs. The Mariners' current rent is $22,000 per game, or about $1.84 million per non-strike season, and it doesn't seem realistic that they would pay more than $3 million in a new park. What would happen if sports teams, like other corporations, were expected to bear the cost of their places of business?

The Mariners' strong finish was mirrored at the gate. Over their last dozen home games (six of them in the post-season), they drew 655,000 paying fans, for an average of more than 56,500 a game. This seemed to refute the front-office claim that they can't make money in the Kingdome. Nevertheless, they stuck to that line, telling reporters that they actually were making very little money from these record-breaking crowds. (Concessions alone must have been a windfall, since the team takes 57.57% off the top of these sales, or more than four dollars out of every seven.) The Mariners have long claimed that they will lose $30 million in 1995. Interestingly, they did not reduce this figure in light of their late-and post-season capacity crowds.

For the first time in 19 years, the M's gave their followers a contending team, and once the fans got over their post-strike resentment and a mediocre first-three-quarters of a season, those fans wore out the turnstiles. Of course, SABRites have long known that a winning team, rather than a fancy stadium, is what spurs attendance. Ironically, if the Mariners had been playing in their new dream ballpark this season, they would have had to turn away at least 100,000 fans in those last dozen games, since its targeted seating capacity is about 46,000.

Changes to the Committee Roster

New members:
Tim Cashion, 5532 S. Kimbark, #2-N, Chicago, IL 60637, t-cashion@uchicago.edu
Scott Davis, 1013 Barbara Drive, West Chester, PA 19382, Davis1053@aol.com
David A. Evans, 43607 Plantation Terrace, Ashburn, VA 22011, Shoes45@aol.com
Mike Haupert, 3514 Robinsdale Avenue, La Crosse, WI 54601, haupert@mail.uwlax.edu

New E-mail addresses:
Doug Pappas: DougP001@aol.com (formerly DougP0001@aol.com)
Neal Traven: Traven2@vms.cis.pitt.edu